

July 1, 1998 Project Update

MEXICAN WOLF RECOVERY PROGRAM

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Cooperator: Arizona Game and Fish Department

Project Update

July 1998

Purpose of this Update

This update provides the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

Field Update

Eleven wolves in three family groups were released from their acclimation pens on March 29 in the Campbell Blue (3), Hawk's Nest (6) and Turkey Creek (2) areas on the Apache National Forest. Biologists are monitoring the wolves' movements by radio telemetry and continue to study their food habits, denning activities, and other behaviors.

As of July 1, seven Mexican wolves remain in the wild: two from the Campbell Blue (CB) pack (**alpha male #166 and alpha female #174**); and five from the Hawk's Nest (HN) pack (**alpha male #131, alpha female #127, subadult female #493, and yearling males #531 and #532**). Three wolves have been returned to captive management pens at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge: alpha female #128 from the Turkey Creek pack, subadult female #494 from Hawk's Nest pack, and yearling female #511 from the Campbell Blue pack. Alpha male # 156 of the Turkey Creek pack was shot and killed on April 28.

During the first month after their release, the three family groups explored areas generally within three miles of the acclimation pens. Alpha pairs have remained together and have expanded their territories to about five miles around the pens. Dispersing wolves have ranged as far as 80 miles (#511) from their release locations. Project personnel provided road-killed elk, deer, pronghorn, and javelina near the acclimation pens to assist the wolves in their transition to the wild.

The HN pack was observed chasing an adult elk on April 7. On April 21, field personnel confirmed a kill of an adult cow elk (reported by local residents) by three young members of the HN pack. Elk calves began appearing towards the end of May and wolves were observed chasing and feeding on elk calves on several occasions. Supplement feeding has been resumed for the CB pair only, because of an injury to the adult female's left rear leg and her apparent poor body condition.

Both the CB and HN packs localized their movements in early May, suggesting the alpha females were denning. The HN female began making forays away from the suspected den location within a few weeks and the CB female appeared to be tending pups through mid June. Inspections of pit-type dens constructed by both packs suggest that pups were born but are no longer surviving. Given the stress of adapting to living in the wild and the wolves' general unfamiliarity with their surroundings, we did not predict or expect successful reproduction during the first year of reintroduction.

In early May, two young female wolves dispersed from their packs. Wolf #494, a two-year-old from the HN pack began spending time away from her packmates in late April. She was located near and with the CB pack for a few days, and began traveling alone again on May 4. She was first located by telemetry near the town of Alpine on May 8, and remained within two miles of Alpine most of the time for the following 20 days. She was frequently observed by local residents, was not aggressive towards people, and was seen among dogs, cattle, horses, and mules. She apparently killed 3 chickens and one duck at one residence, but no other injuries to domestic animals occurred. Project personnel attempted to aversively condition her with pyrotechnic devices but were not able to discourage her presence in the area. It is likely that she found a local food source. Alpine residents were extremely helpful in reporting sightings to field personnel and allowing traps to be set on their private land. Wolf #494 was captured without injury in a modified foothold trap one mile west of Alpine on May 28. She was thin but otherwise in good condition and was transported the same day to an enclosure at Sevilleta Refuge.

Wolf #511 was last located with her parents in the CB pack on May 5. On May 7 she was tracked from a sighting report at the Talwiwi Lodge (3 miles north of Alpine) to Nutrioso. She continued to move north and west for the next 11 days, visiting areas in or near Vernon, Show Low, and Linden. She was captured about 16 miles west of Snowflake, Arizona, on May 18 with a net fired from a helicopter. She appeared to be in good condition, and was returned to an enclosure at Sevilleta Refuge.

Wolf #493 dispersed from her Hawk's Nest packmates on June 8, and was about a mile from the rest of the pack on June 9. She was located in the Blue River drainage on June 11 and 12; three miles northwest of Luna, NM, on June 13; on the north side of Escudilla Mountain from June 16 to 24; and a few miles southwest of Big Lake on the western edge of the recovery area from June 26 to 29. She localized near a campground in the area, and was captured on July 9 and returned to her pack's home range. She remains with them as of July 13.

On June 26, wolf #531 was located on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and was found there again on June 27 and 29. Monitoring of #531 was coordinated with the White Mountain Apache Tribe. Wolf #531 returned to his pack of his own accord on July 9, and remains with them as of July 13.

Closures Currently in Effect

None

Wolf/Human Interactions

The TC pair demonstrated curiosity and lack of fear of people on several occasions. They exhibited nonchalance toward project personnel when radio tracking, who then began a program of aversive conditioning with pyrotechnic devices. The TC wolves also appeared to be attracted to dogs in camps in the area. This is not abnormal behavior for wolves especially during the breeding season. Project

personnel visited camps in the home range of the TC pair and talked with the occupants about the potential conflicts that could arise between their dogs and the wolves.

On April 28, alpha male #156 was shot and killed by a camper. A family and their two dogs had set up camp within the TC pair's territory. The camp was not within a developed or designated Forest Service campground. The wolves approached to within about 40 yards of the family's camp on two occasions during the morning. Contrary to media accounts, the wolves did not "enter" the camp. At approximately 10:00 am, the family apparently heard a scuffle, approached the sound, and saw one wolf run away. The other wolf ran up the hill, circled around and approached within 50 feet of the camper and his wife, who, feeling threatened, shot the wolf. The camper then discovered that one of his dogs had been fighting with the wolves and had been injured. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) law enforcement personnel investigated the case and found no evidence of a violation of the Endangered Species Act. No charges were filed. Project biologists believe the wolves were attracted to the camp by the campers' two dogs and that an actual attack of the humans by the wolves would have been extremely unlikely.

Female #128 was recaptured by baiting her into the acclimation pen on May 1. She was pregnant and within two days of delivering pups when she was returned to an enclosure at Sevilleta Refuge on May 3. The female carefully tended her den, but only one live pup was observed, and it was found dead on June 15. The cause of its death could not be determined.

Wolf/Livestock Interactions

On May 16, the Wildlife Services Wolf Management Specialist (WS) investigated a report of a wolf attack on a blue heeler dog. Although no radio locations of wolves had been made in the area of the attack, it was within the potential range of the CB pack, which was thought to be denning at the time. Large canid tracks and scat were found in the area, and fatal damage to the dog was consistent with a wolf attack. The attack was confirmed to be wolf-caused and referred to Defenders of Wildlife, which paid compensation for the animal because it was a stock herding dog.

On May 18, a complaint of an injured miniature horse colt was investigated by WS. The timing of attack was consistent with locations of dispersing wolf #511 and the bite marks consistent with a wolf attack. The depredation was confirmed and referred to Defenders of Wildlife, which paid for veterinary care. The colt has recovered.

On May 19, WS investigated a complaint of a dead colt near Clay Springs. Although #511 had been located not far from this area, no evidence supporting wolf attack was found. Damage to the colt, which died three days after the attack, was consistent with a dog or coyote attack.

The HN wolves were observed chasing cattle on three occasions and horses on one occasion. No depredations occurred during these instances. WS investigated a complaint of missing calves on June 10, but no evidence of depredation by wolves or other predators was found.

Dispersing subadult female #493 attacked a calf that was left stranded in a pasture following the transfer of its mother and the rest of the herd to another pasture. The rancher observed the incident, fired a shot in the air and chased the wolf away from the calf by running and shouting at it. The calf was not injured.

Coordination

An informational workshop for state, tribal, and federal biologists was hosted by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) on April 17. Interagency team members provided sessions on wolf ecology and identification, provisions of the experimental population rule, reintroduction techniques, depredation management, law enforcement, and public outreach.

On April 21, David Parsons (USFWS) and Dan Groebner (AGFD) provided a project briefing and information workshop in Whiteriver, Arizona, for personnel with the Wildlife and Outdoor Recreation Department of the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

Groebner has been coordinating with U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wilderness staff on issues related to the monitoring and management of wolves in wilderness areas.

The field team (Alan Armistead, Diane Boyd-Heger, Wendy Brown, Paul Morey, Caddie Pruss, and Dan Stark) have coordinated extensively with local residents and ranchers since the release of the wolves. Local residents and ranchers have been very cooperative and helpful in resolving potential wolf-related conflicts.

As required by the Environmental Assessment for the acclimation pens, field staff initiated surveys near the pen sites for the endangered peregrine falcon and threatened Mexican spotted owl.

Parsons attended the national gray wolf recovery strategy meeting at the USFWS National Conservation Training Center on May 20-21. On June 29, the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the USFWS announced their intent to remove gray wolves in the Great Lakes area from the endangered species list and to reclassify gray wolves in Montana from endangered to threatened. Under this proposal to reclassify gray wolves nationwide which is expected to be published in six to eight months, the status of the Mexican wolf will not change. That is, it will remain listed as an endangered species, and the reintroduced wolves will remain a nonessential, experimental population. If you wish to be placed on a mailing list to receive updates on the gray wolf reclassification process, please write to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gray Wolf Review, 1 Federal Drive, Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056, send an e-mail message to graywolfmail@mail.fws.gov, visit the web site at <http://www.fws.gov/r3pao/wolf/>, or call the USFWS gray wolf information line at 612-713-7337.

Outreach

One page updates for local residents are posted regularly in Alpine, Springerville, and Clifton in various public places such as post offices, libraries, and USFS offices.

Field updates are provided on the USFWS Mexican wolf web site approximately weekly at <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/wolf/>.

The Mexican Wolf Interagency Reporting Hotline is up and running. Call toll-free 1-888-459-WOLF (9653) to report sightings, harassment, or taking of Mexican wolves, or to report livestock depredation.

Signs have been posted at trail heads, campgrounds, and major forest roads on the Apache National Forest advising people of the presence of protected Mexican wolves with recommendations for camping and hunting in wolf country.

Project personnel talk to people who are camped near wolf territories to advise them of their

proximity to wolves and what to do if they see a wolf. If dogs are present in the camp, they provide advice on how to minimize the potential for interaction between the dogs and wolves.

Notices are being sent to all hunters who draw permits to hunt big game in the wolf recovery area. These notices advise hunters of the potential for encountering wolves and of the legal provisions of the nonessential, experimental population rule.

On May 13, Armistead and Boyd-Heger provided a wolf project update to local residents at a public meeting hosted by the USFS in Alpine. The presence of wolf #494 in the Alpine area was a primary topic of concern. Approximately 50 people attended.

Armistead represented WS and the reintroduction project at a conference in San Angelo, Texas sponsored by Defenders of Wildlife to bring livestock interests, wolf advocates, and agency representatives together.

Numerous presentations were made by project staff to educational institutions, civic groups, and non-profit organizations. Project biologists have conducted many media interviews and field visits.

Partnership Activities

The Defenders of Wildlife paid compensation for replacement of the blue heeler ranch dog and for veterinary treatment of the injured miniature horse.

The Ladder Ranch captive wolf management facility continues to maintain five mated pairs of Mexican wolves that are candidates for future releases. One of these pairs produced three pups this breeding season.

Thirty-nine zoos and wildlife sanctuaries now hold Mexican wolves and cooperate in the American Zoo and Aquarium Association's Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan.

Captive Population Update

There are currently 164 yearling and adult Mexican wolves in the captive population. Additionally, at least eight litters comprising at least 21 pups have been born, including one Aragon x Certified cross and one Ghost Ranch x Certified cross.

Litigation

Several livestock industry associations filed suit in New Mexico Federal District Court alleging that the Department of the Interior and the USFWS violated the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Administrative Procedure Act in authorizing and implementing the Mexican wolf reintroduction project. The Department of Justice has submitted answers to the plaintiff's complaint. The plaintiffs have also filed a motion for a preliminary injunction (to prevent additional releases). The Government must respond by the end of July.

Life in Wolf Country

This is a new feature of our Project Update. The idea was suggested by a person who was interviewed during our public interaction needs assessment. We encourage individuals living within or near the

wolf recovery area to share their experiences and insights with other readers. We hope that this will foster open discussion of important issues and concerns of local residents.

What are the guidelines? We ask that your articles be respectful of others and their views and be 250 words or less in length. We will publish your article verbatim, unless it deviates from the guidelines. If we must edit your article, we will do our best to retain its original intent.

This update reaches over 3,000 people throughout the United States and several foreign countries who have expressed an interest in remaining informed about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. This is your chance to share useful information, voice your opinion and ideas, stimulate debate, or make suggestions to project managers.

*Please submit your articles to either of the two addresses at the end of this update by **October 1, 1998**. We are looking forward to hearing from you.*

Information Materials

Many information materials are available through our web site: **<http://ifw2es.fws.gov/wolf/>**

You may also contact us at the addresses below. We also welcome your ideas about our written communications, our outreach efforts generally, and any specific suggestions you have about how to improve the Project Update:

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